

Wanted: A Few Good Shepherds

A Biblical Study of Church Leadership

Chapter One

Who Will Lead Us?

A STORY CAME my way about a couple of stray dogs in St. Louis County. Bob Lyner tells how the male and female would occasionally appear on his farm.

One day the male dog showed up alone. Lyner said the brown German shepherd would run toward him, then away, then back in his direction again. The dog's attempt to communicate finally compelled Lyner to follow him into the cornfield. There he showed the human his companion, who was lying on the ground with her leg shot off. Lyner immediately called for a vet. While waiting, the male continually licked the wound of the female. Her leg was eventually amputated, but she survived.

Interesting, isn't it, how even animals care for each other? Basic to our survival is the need to look out for one another. I suppose the fact that the dog was a German shepherd is what really caught my eye. For the focus of this booklet is the role of a shepherd—not a *German* shepherd, but a *church* shepherd.

As we begin our study, let's move from the cornfield and the dogs—to real life and real people. Imagine these three scenes:

**Tragedy strikes.* You're in the hospital, holding the hand of the person you love more than life itself. A car wreck has rendered the body beaten and broken—no one knows if the future holds life or death. You pick up the phone to call for prayer. Some would call the chaplain, but you don't. Many would call a minister on staff; you don't. Instead you call an elder. You know him by name; he knows you by name; he doesn't wear a collar or a robe or go by "Reverend," but he does have a heart for people and a wealth of experience. He may have no seminary degree, but he has been around the block enough to know how hurts come and how hurts are healed. Within minutes of the call, he and his wife are present with you.

**You have a friend who wants to become a Christian.* You are excited, but confused. You don't know what to say. You don't know how to teach, but you know someone who does. Again, he's not on staff; he doesn't have an office at the church. He, like you, has a full-time job with responsibilities and tasks. He's an elder. But he is a good teacher and you know he can guide your friend to Christ. So you arrange for the three of you to have lunch. The gospel is shared and a soul is saved.

**One final scene.* Imagine a group of a dozen or so men and their wives in a meeting. They have gathered to determine the future of the church. Yet, before them are no budgets or architectural drawings. They don't discuss blueprints or expenditures. They pray. Name by name and heart by heart, they pray for the church. Who are they? Elders and their wives dedicating themselves to intercede for the church.

A member in pain—an elder draws near. A member confused—an elder draws near. A church moving forward—elders leading the way.

Such is how it should be. Such is God's intent. God never meant for the church to be a hierarchy with one person in charge. He never planned for a select few to perform all the ministry—he never intended for a certain few to do all the teaching or counseling. Ever since the resurrected Lord looked at Peter on the shores of Galilee and said, "Feed my sheep," (Jn. 21:15) there have been shepherds—overseers of the church dedicated to the task of leading, feeding, and the caring of sheep.

AN ESSENTIAL PLAN

It is essential that the church be led by a plurality of godly leaders. It's not optional. It's not advisable. It is essential. Leaders set the pace and set the example for the church. There has never been a strong church without strong leaders. There has never been a prayerful church without prayerful leaders. There has never been a visionary church without visionary leadership. There has never been a growing church without growing leaders. If the leaders are weak, the church will be weak. But if the leaders are strong, the church will be strong.

There is no higher privilege than to be an elder in the Lord's church. It is a noble position: "What I say is true: Anyone wanting to become an elder desires a good work," wrote Paul (1 Tim. 3:1).

To be an elder is to follow in the steps of Jesus himself: "You were like sheep that wandered away, but now you have come back to the Shepherd and Protector of your souls" (1 Pet. 2:25).

In fact, to be an elder is to imitate the heart of God: "He takes care of his people like a shepherd. He gathers them like lambs in his arms and carries them close to him. He gently leads the mothers of the lambs" (Isa. 40:11).

What a tender picture. God as the shepherd carrying his people as one would carry a lamb. Close to him so they will feel his warmth and know his care. Gently leading the mothers of the lambs. That is how God leads us: as a shepherd and through the shepherds.

That is what God's church should be: a place where everyone knows an elder and everyone is known by an elder.

Elders were never intended to be aloof figures at the top of an organizational chart. Or nameless faces behind locked doors. Or a volunteer fire department whose only task is putting out fires. Elders were intended to be godly men dedicated to the feeding, leading, and caring of the church.

The tenth chapter of John shows us how personal this relationship should be. These verses not only demonstrate the pastoral care of Jesus, but also reveal the nature of a shepherd.

*The shepherd "calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (Jn. 10:4).

A good shepherd doesn't look upon the sheep as a herd to lead but as a family to care for. He knows members by name. He knows their victories and their defeats. He's acquainted with their successes and their struggles. But not only does he know them—they know *him*!

*The sheep "follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger" (Jn. 10:4,5). The elder is no stranger to a church. They hear his voice and follow. They hear his instruction and obey. When he tells them they should change pastures or beware of the wolves, they believe him and follow. He is no stranger to them.

WHAT IS AN ELDER?

The New Testament interchangeably uses three words for elder. Each is appropriate and significant.

- ~ *poimaino*—(translated—“pastor;” literally— “shepherd”)—suggests one who feeds and cares for the sheep
- ~ *presbuteros*—(translated—“elder;” literally— “one who is older”)—suggests the importance of spiritual maturity
- ~ *episkopos*—(translated—“bishop or overseer;” literally—“one who looks after”)— suggests one who is skilled in leadership

Ideally, an elder is able to provide both administrative leadership and pastoral care. Realistically, each elder tends to lean one way or the other. For that reason it is appropriate for elders to designate within their ranks those who devote themselves to pastoral care and those who devote themselves to leadership.

In the first letter Paul wrote to Timothy, he speaks to a church which already has elders and a church which has problems. This is a church Paul knows intimately, as he spent three years of service with these Christians. Some of their problems include:

- Gender struggles (2:9)
- False teachers who follow the teachings of demons (4:2)
- Legalists who forbid marriage and the eating of certain food (4:3)
- Disruptive members who disrespect the elders and their compensation (4:16)
- Materialism and arrogance (6:6)

Paul’s manner of dealing with these problems is to fortify the leadership. He devotes extensive time to Timothy, who is a young evangelist with the church; to deacons and their qualifications; and to the elders. He speaks little about what elders *do* but much about who elders *are*, as if to suggest the right heart is more important than the right job description.

His extensive instruction on this begins in I Timothy 3:1. Though brief, this verse offers five important insights regarding the role of an elder. “What I say is true: Anyone wanting to become an elder desires a good work.”

1. *Eldership is an essential ministry.* Note the formula at the beginning of the verse. “What I say is true.” Paul uses the phrase five times: 1 Timothy 1:15, 3:1, 4:9, 2 Timothy 2:11, Titus 3:8. It signals a trustworthy statement. Patently clear. A believable fact. In the pastoral epistles this formula always precedes important fact. By virtue of this saying, Paul is signifying a vital topic. The early church put a high premium on the calling to church leadership, even though in that era the danger of being a church leader was great! Paul is urging young men to aspire, to long for this task. To aspire to be a church leader is a God-given passion.
2. *The eldership is a limited ministry.* A best translation would render I Timothy 3:1: “If a man desires the office of overseer, he desires a good work.” (KJV) The office is limited to men. The use of the Greek *tis* in the masculine form indicates that men are in reference here. The context of 1 Timothy 2:11–14 implies that the women are to be under the leadership of the men. They are equal in blessing and responsibility~ burden and promise, but the leadership of the church falls squarely on the shoulders of men. When we examine the qualities of elders in the next verses, we see that if elders are married they are to be the husbands of one wife. Had God intended for females to serve as elders, this would have been a perfect opportunity for that to be made clear. As we continue the study in 1 Timothy 3:2–6 we see that there is a listing of qualifying adjectives always listed in the masculine form. That is not to say women shouldn’t have leadership roles and leadership responsibilities or, in my opinion, occasionally publicly teach the church. That is to say that the ultimate mantle of leadership is worn by godly men. In many societies women are

dehumanized. They are crushed, enslaved, and exploited. Scripture in no way endorses such treatment. But Scripture is equally clear that the church, like the home, is to fall under male leadership.

3. *The eldership is a desired ministry.* There are two words in the Bible for *desire*—*and* both appear in this verse. The first is *oregomi*, which means to reach out after or seek or pursue. It can even mean covet, as it does in I Timothy 6:10. The second is *epithumia*, which implies a passion or compulsion. The first word is an outward effort, the second an inward fire.

Combine these two words and the result is a combustion of desire—one who pursues leadership with his life because he is driven on the inside. The man desires the eldership in emotion and action.

Please note: desire is not the *only* prerequisite, but it is the first prerequisite. The starting point in discovering an elder is the God-given desire to fulfill that capacity. Elders shouldn't be recruited or coerced. Elders should only be recognized. We shouldn't think that, by giving the title, the service will follow. We shouldn't think that if they aren't pastoring today, they will after being called. We should rather look for men who are already pastoring, already feeding, leading, and caring, and we should acknowledge their gift of leadership.

Elders are elders *before* they are elders. Something is wrong if a person is appointed as an elder and then says, "Where is my flock and how do I pastor?" Something is right about looking around the church for flocks who follow shepherds saying, "We'd like to recognize you as a shepherd of this church." Men who pastor, pastor before they are given the title. They have a heart for the church and a love for the flock and it is impossible for them not to pastor because they have a desire, a God-given desire to pastor.

"I beg you to shepherd God's flock, for whom you are responsible. Watch over them because you want to, not because you are forced. This is how God wants it. Do it because you are happy to serve. Not because you want money" (1 Pet. 5:2).

The picture here is a willing shepherd. Not one seeking power, not one seeking fame, not one seeking something to fill spare time. (A good elder has no spare time.) But one who wants to watch over people.

As John MacArthur says: "One who is qualified to be an elder will be eager to give his life totally to the teaching of the Word of God and the leading of the flock of God, without any thought of gain at all. He will desire the office, pursue being set apart, and devote himself to it. No one will have to talk him into it. It is his heart's passion."

4. *The eldership is an elevated ministry.* Not elevated in status, but elevated in terms of responsibility and respect. The word used in 1 Timothy 3:1 for elder is *episkopos*, which means leader or overseer. This word was used in the Greek culture to refer to a city manager or inspector, steward. Also among the Essenes, a group of monastic Jews, who had an *episkopoi* in the Qumran culture. This leader had the duty of commanding, teaching, disciplining, and shepherding the people. Then and today the overseer has a wide range of spiritual responsibility.

- They are responsible for our souls (Heb. 13:17).
- They rule (1 Tim 5:17).
- They preach and teach (1 Tim 5:17).
- They pray (James 5:14).
- They care for the church (1 Pet. 5:1,2).
- They set church policy (Acts 15:22).
- They ordain others (1 Tim. 4:14).

Considering these crucial responsibilities, we can see why Paul states that being an elder is "a worthy calling."

The phrase means a noble, excellent, high-quality work. No elder should stoop to be a king. Being an elder is the highest and greatest calling one may have.

For that reason Paul tells the Thessalonians, appreciate those who work hard among you, who lead you in the Lord and teach you. Respect them with a very special love because of the work they do" (1 Thess. 5:13).

This is a good point to pause and ask yourself the questions: Do you respect your elders with a very special love? Do you honor and elevate them? I know of one elder who said he dreads going to church because he feels like he carries a spit bucket. When people see him coming, they work up a wad of their most recent complaint or gripe and spit in his bucket.

Sadly, many potential elders avoid the service, for they have seen how their predecessors have been treated. Elders can't satisfy everyone. They aren't called to please you; they are called to *lead you*. You didn't elect them, God did.

God has a special honor for these special servants.

Peter speaks to his fellow elders and says: when Christ, the Chief Shepherd, comes, you will get a glorious crown that will never lose its beauty" (1 Pet. 5:4).

5. *Finally, the eldership is a rigorous ministry.* Note Paul says that anyone who desires to be an elder desires a good work. Not a hobby, club membership, or pastime.

Being a good elder is hard work. Being a lazy elder is easy. But devoting yourself to the care of the flock is an arduous task. You don't stop being an elder when you leave the building. You never have all of the questions answered or the members healthy. You never have a week with just victories and no defeats.

But it is a work with great reward.

BIBLICAL GUIDELINES FOR SELECTION

How do we select elders? Though procedures may vary among churches, some general guidelines apply universally: *ponder, pray pronounce*. First comes study. Any church decision-maker should ponder the Word. What does Scripture tell us about the characteristics of an elder? How can we learn what an elder looks like? Can anyone be an elder? How do we know elder material when we see it? Can anyone be excluded from the eldership?

In selecting church leaders, the goal is not to seek the elders man wants, but to seek the elders God wants. So the next step is to pray and fast.

“They chose elders for each church, by praying and giving up eating for a certain time” (Acts 14:23).

Acts 13:2 says that the instructions from the Holy Spirit came to Paul and Barnabas while “They were all worshipping the Lord and giving up eating for a certain time.”

Recognizing elders is not a matter of mental logic but spiritual humility. “Be careful for yourselves and all the people the Holy Spirit has given you to care for” (Acts 20:28).

Then, pronounce. It’s important to note that the biblical principle leaves the burden of this decision with the current leadership:

*Initially it was the apostles who appointed the elders (Acts 14:23).

*Those close to the apostles appointed the elders. For example, Paul charged Titus with ordaining elders (Titus 1:5).

Calling men to serve as elders is the most important decision of a church. It must be taken seriously by every single member by prayer and fasting. Go into this matter lightly and give Satan a foothold and he will split any church like an old burlap sack. Paul told the Ephesian elders that “some from your own group will rise up and twist the truth and will lead away followers after them” (Acts 20:30).

But go into this matter humbly, seeking God’s guidance, and the shepherds God selects will come forth.¹

The Blameless Heart

I MAgINE THAT you are going on an extended trip. Pretend that you are departing for several months and have to leave your children behind. You plan to eventually return and take them with you, but for the immediate future, they must remain in the care of someone else.

How carefully would you select the caretaker of your children? Would you invite just any individual to take the job? Of course not. You would screen the applicants. You would probe the personalities of the finalists. And when you narrowed the decision down to one person, you would look him or her in the eye and say, “This is my child I am entrusting to you. My flesh and blood. My heart and soul. Be diligent in your task.”

Why would you be so careful? Simple. You love your children too much to leave them in the care of the immature or ill-prepared. You don’t leave a precious child in irresponsible hands. A parent doesn’t and neither does God. The church is precious to him. Listen to what he says to elders: You must be like shepherds to the church of God, which he bought with his own blood (Acts 20:28).

What a sobering reminder! Overseers shepherd God’s greatest treasure: his church. Far more valuable than any mountain range, gold mine, or waterfall is the church of Jesus Christ. With his blood he has bought it and in his wisdom he has placed it under the care of godly men. Jesus is saying, “I am putting you in charge of my children. I have purchased them, died for them and called them. Now, you guard them. Guard them like shepherds guard sheep.”

Just as you would seek the best person available to care for your children, so the Holy Spirit seeks the right man to shepherd his church. What kind of man does he seek? What kind of man is to be ordained or set aside? Paul answers this question in 1 Timothy 3:2.

This passage serves as a flagship for the fleet of traits that follow. An elder must not give people a reason to criticize him:

A bishop must be blameless. (KJV)

A church leader must be without fault. (TEV)

A pastor must be a good man who cannot be spoken against. (TLB)

Now the overseer must be above reproach.

(NW, RSV, NF.V)

For the office of a bishop a man must be of blameless reputation. (PHILLIPS)

...must have impeccable character. (JERUSALEM BIBLE)

Some grammatical observations are helpful:

1. The word *must* is *dei* in the Greek, a particle which suggests absolute necessity. No option. No negotiation. Extremely important. A transliteral reading looks like this: “It behooves, therefore, the bishop without reproach to be.”
2. It’s important to note that the phrase is in the present participle, which suggests a present state of blamelessness. This doesn’t mean he never committed a sin, or has no error in his past. It implies that in his current history, he is above reproach. In question is not what he did years in the past, but presently. Certainly not a question of what he did before he was a Christian.
3. The word for “above reproach” is *anepileptos*, which means “not able to be held or taken hold of”; in other words, evidence against him is insufficient for his detainment or arrest. You may accuse him but the accusations don’t stick. He leads a life unmarred by a prevailing sin, be it a vice, habit, attitude, or an event. He is beyond accusation.

Does this mean he never slips or sins? No. It means he never dwells in a state of sin that could be a reflection on the church. Does this mean his past is perfect and without blemish? No, but it does mean that any dark chapter of his past has been dealt with in such a manner that he and those closest to him have put it to rest.

I like this paragraph by Alexander Strauch, who writes:

“He is a man with an irreproachable life in the sight of others. He is free from any disgraceful blight of character or conduct. Hence critics cannot discredit his profession or prove him unfit as a community leader. Since all God’s saints are to live holy and blameless lives, since the world casts a critical eye at the Christian community, and since leaders led primarily by example, a blameless life is indispensable to the Christian elder.”

There are two very important reasons why God seeks blameless men to lead his church: to set the right example on the inside and send the right message to the outside. So the family on the inside will be inspired and the observers on the outside will be impressed.

I can remember as a youngster having a high jump bar in the backyard. I spent many hours throwing myself over the bar, which was a cane fishing pole, and landing in the pit, which was an old mattress. I was proud of my achievements until the day my big brother and his friends came by.

They raised the bar. When they jumped, their minimum was my maximum. They began where I finished. They jumped higher than I’d ever dreamed. When they left, the bar was at a new level. And I had a new concept of what it meant to jump high. They had set a new standard.

Elders are called to raise the bar in the church. They set the example and lift the standard of what it means to be a Christian. Ideally, an elder should do for your life what my brother’s friends did for my high-jumping. Being with them should cause us to think higher thoughts and set higher dreams. The life of an elder should inspire us to raise the bar in our home life, prayer life, character, and dedication.

For that reason Peter urges elders to “. . . be good examples. . . .” (1 Pet. 5:3).

If the elders set the standard, the church will follow. If the elders are cooperative, the church will be cooperative. If the elders are contentious, the church will be contentious. If the elders are hospitable, the church will be as well. If they are selfish, the church will be selfish. If they are servants, the church will be servants. If they are power-hungry and territorial, the church will be. . . well, you get the message.

And not only do they set the example for those inside, they send a message to those outside the church. An elder must have the respect of people who are not in the church so he will not be criticized by others and fall into the devil’s trap (1 Tim. 3:7).

Consider this principle: Protection reveals the price.

When you think of Buckingham Palace in London, you immediately picture the Palace Guard: the high-hatted, squarejawed, unblinking soldiers who guard the royal family. The presence of such disciplined soldiers states to any who pass: “we value who is inside.”

What if England used sloppy guards? What if they posted illkept soldiers? What if the guards snoozed at the post or passed the time reading magazines and whistling at the girls? The obvious conclusion would be that this country does not value this family.

In guarding his church, God urges us to seek the best men.

Why? Observers will make decisions about the church by the men we ask to guard it. If we appoint men of compromised faith or questionable character, critics will notice and the reputation of the church will suffer. But if blameless men lead, then outsiders will see the value of the church.

Imagine the damage it does if a man of ill-repute in the community is placed in church leadership. The men in the Lion’s Club know he’s dishonest. The folks at work know he is a jerk. His golf buddies know he’s sleeping around. Yet he’s a pastor in the church? The community will draw this conclusion: “That church must not be serious about its mission.”

Yet, on the other hand, imagine the good done for the church when those in leadership are respected by the community. Those at work know he is fair. Those in the neighborhood know he is kind. Even his competition respects his skill and judgment. When the community hears that such a man has been appointed as bishop, they will likely think, “That’s the kind of church I’d like to be a part of someday.”

Both of these reasons, by the way, help us understand why sinning elders are to be rebuked publicly (1 Tim. 5:19). An elder’s sin is more than a personal matter; it is a bad example to the entire church and a poor reflection on the entire church.

By the way, this is not a double standard. Leaders are to model the lifestyle to which all members should aspire. This is not a standard which leaders have and members don’t. It is simply a standard which leaders set so we will know we can follow.

The Character of Church Leaders

WHAT CHARACTERISTICS should a church leader possess? I try to avoid the word “qualifications,” for that leaves the impression that if a man doesn’t bat a thousand percent in each area, he is disqualified. If a man is expected to excel in each area, then no one will qualify.

Instead, I prefer these terms: qualities of an elder, traits of an elder, or even characteristics of an elder. These are areas in which, though the man may not be perfect, he is above reproach. You can consider these parts of his life and see that he is a good example to the church and sends a good message to the community.

Paul insists that the elders be men above reproach in the following ways.

1. “. . . must have only one wife.” (literally, a “one-woman man”; moral and faithful)

Myar gynaikos andra could best be understood as “a one-woman kind of man.” It is a statement of self-control and loyalty more than a requirement of marital status. The emphasis is on “one.” It describes a man who, if married, is able to maintain a marital commitment and resist the temptation of infidelity. The stress is on character, not marital status.

“In other words, the elder must be characterized as a one-woman man who is not flirtatious, promiscuous, or involved in a questionable relationship with another woman. Viewed this way, Paul is not referring exclusively to the marital status of the prospective elder but to a character trait—just as he does with most of the other qualifications for elders.”¹

Why is this first in the list? Consider the weaknesses of most men and you’ll find the answer. Sexual purity is a testing ground of a man’s moral character. If a man is unable to honor a covenant to his bride, it is questionable if he will be able to honor a covenant to the church.

2. Self-controlled (literally, “wineless”; able to control his urges)

This trait honors the ability of a man to control his urges. In a literal sense the word would speak of a man who is sober when it comes to the use of alcohol.

That is certainly part of the meaning. But alcohol is not the only element in the world which can fuzzy your thinking or addict your body. The broader application of the word suggests a freedom from all excesses, whether it be alcohol, gambling, pornography, greed, or gluttony.

The reason for this is obvious. If a man is to lead the church he must be able to stand on his feet; alert, vigilant, and clearheaded. Elsewhere Paul writes: “In a war, if a trumpet does not give a clear sound, who will prepare for battle?” (1 Cor. 14:8). Good question. Would you follow a drunken bugler? Could you understand a drunken bugler?

3. Wise (sober-minded; prudent; a well-disciplined person)

Anyone who has dwelt long with the truths of the human drama will gain a candid approach to life. Any man who believes in sin, hell, the cross, and evil will not live in a state of silliness. This trait describes that man. A serious man, not devoid of humor but who possesses a conviction of heart. There is a pervasive sense of truth in his heart.

The word “wise” carries the meaning of a well-disciplined mind. “Do not change yourselves to be like the people of this world, but be changed within by a new way of thinking” (Rom. 12:2). Not rash. Carefully reasoned. An elder is constantly put in decision postures—forced to render crucial judgment. For that reason, he must be wise or prudent.

4. Respected by others (literally, “orderly”; not given to extremes or erratic behavior)

Were you kept awake last night for fear of a falling planet? Or do you live in anxiety that the earth will spin off its axis and fly into space? Nor do I. Our universe is amazingly orderly. The heavens are not without an occasionally surprising meteor or falling star, but, by and large, they are harmonious and predictable.

Elders should be orderly as well. In fact, the word Paul chooses here is *kosmion*—a descendant of *kosmos* which refers to the system of the universe. Like the universe, an elder should be orderly, not given to extremes or erratic behavior. He may have mood swings and tough days, but the church isn’t on edge anticipating his tantrums or eccentricities.

I remember as a youngster serving as a Boy Scout in a troop led by a disorderly troop master. We never knew if he was coming to the meetings. He would go weeks without showing up. Then after a prolonged absence, he would appear, sit us down, and give a repentant speech. Through tears he would apologize and pledge to do

better and for a few weeks our troop would be a frenzy of activity, but then he'd disappear again.

He was disorderly. Not a trait you seek in a leader.

5. "... ready to welcome guests" (literally, "lover of strangers"; hospitable to all)

What a helpful word this is! The term originates from a delightful word, *philoxenos*. *Xenos* means stranger. *Philo* from *phileo*—to love or show affection. We think of Hebrews 13:2, "Remember to welcome strangers. because some who have done this have welcomed angels without knowing it" (Heb. 13:2).

What does it mean to be hospitable? Does it mean to be a great cook? Does it mean one has a steady flow of church friends in your house? Perhaps, but this word implies much more. This is not a word about being with friends but a word about loving those who aren't your friends. This is a person who has an eye out for strangers. When he comes to church he doesn't instantly gravitate to his coffee and pie group. He, on the other hand, flows in the direction of strangers. He has little antennae on the back of his neck which send off a signal when he is near a visitor or newcomer.

What a God-like quality! For hasn't God done that for us? "... in Christ Jesus, you who were far away from God are brought near through the blood of Christ's death" (Eph. 2:13). All of us are strangers befriended by God.

6. "... able to teach. . ." (literally, "skilled in teaching")

This trait sets deacons apart from elders: a marked skill of teaching. Why is the skill of teaching placed here? Why an ability in the midst of moral qualifications? Because teaching is essentially a moral effort. One's life must back up his words. John MacArthur says, "You must pattern in your life what you propagate in your teaching. "2 Paul urges Timothy: Be careful in your life and in your teaching (1 Tim. 4:16).

In 1 Timothy 5:17 we read, "The elders who lead the church well should receive double honor, especially those who work hard by speaking and teaching." The phrase "work hard" means one who works to exhaustion in word and doctrine. Here is a picture of a student who diligently studies God's word and adequately expresses his faith.

An interesting combination of the words "pastor" and "teacher" can be found in the book of Ephesians. "And Christ gave... some to have the work of caring for and teaching God's people" (4:11).

The phrase "caring for" is from the Greek word *poimen*, which translates "pastor." The word teacher is the same one referred to above, *didaskaloi*. Many think Paul is referring here not to two positions, but one. Not pastors and teachers, but rather pastors who teach. The word for "and" is *kai*, which often translates, "that is" or "in particular." Paul is possibly referring then to a "pastor-teacher," or one who dedicates himself to the task of teaching the flock.

Teaching is inherent in leadership:

"By telling these things to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus..." (1 Tim. 4:6).

"Command and teach these things." (4:11)

"Be careful in your life and in your teaching" (4:16).

"...work hard by speaking and teaching..." (5:17).

Like hospitality, teaching is a God-like quality. Jesus was known not as a miracle-worker or a military general or administrator, but rather a teacher. An elder should have the ability to articulate his faith and doctrine.

7. He must not drink too much wine (not under the control of, addicted, preoccupied, or overindulgent with wine).

Listen to this horrible description of the elders of Israel in Isaiah 28:7–8:

"But now those leaders are drunk with wine; they stumble from too much beer.

The priests and prophets are drunk with beer and are filled with wine. They stumble from too much beer.

The prophets are drunk when they see their visions; their judges stumble when they make their decisions.

Every table is covered with vomit, so there is not a clean place anywhere."

What a repulsive picture! They can't make a good decision or take a sober step. People are misled by alcohol. People are abused by alcohol.

Elders should distance themselves from drink. It's no accident that this trait is followed by:

8. "... or like to fight." (*plektes*—literally, "a striker"; pugnacious, contentious, or quarrelsome)

A fighter is a pugnacious person who likes to quarrel. A fighter will strike the sheep rather than lead them. He may not hit them with his fist, but he often does with his words. Has a sermon ever left you bruised and beaten? Has a pastor ever used his position or pulpit to remind you of how much you've failed and how weak you are? A preacher doesn't have to strike with his hands to do damage. He can hurt with his words.

There is a temptation in leadership to use the office to control others, to manipulate their emotions, to cause them to be dependent on your approval and fearful of your disdain. Both physical and verbal violence have no

place in the kingdom.

9. "... gentle. . ." (literally, "forbearing, magnanimous, peaceable, forgiving"; willing to yield and make allowances for the fallen human condition)

I jog every morning to a chorus of birds. As if they sing to celebrate the sunrise, they fill the air with music. It's worthy to note that none of the music is made by the mighty eagle or the powerful hawk. You've never heard a note from a condor or a turkey. But the wren, the canary, the lark; how soothing is their singing. The sweetest music comes from the gentle birds. So it is with Christians, the sweetest music comes from the gentlest hearts.

God is gentle, "Lord, you are kind and forgiving and have great love for those who call to you" (Ps. 86:5). The word "forgiving" in the Septuagint, (Greek translation of the Old Testament) is the same word Paul uses to describe the trait of an elder. God expects his undershepherds to lead as he does.

No man can maintain a gentle heart without an honest view of his own sin and God's grace. The following words are attributed to John Newton, the converted slave-trader who became a preacher and songwriter. Legend records this deathbed statement to a young minister:

"True I'm going on before you, but you'll soon come after me. When you arrive, our friendship will no doubt cause you to inquire for me. But I can tell you where you'll most likely find me—I'll be sitting at the feet of the thief whom Jesus saved in his dying moments on the cross."³

May all elders have such aspirations.

10. "... peaceable" (literally, "uncontentious"; seeks to unite, not divide)

Paul describes false teachers as those who are "sick with a love for arguing and fighting about words" (1 Tim. 6:4). What a strong phrase! They are "sick"! There is no place for compromise or tolerance. They are prideful and boastful. It's always "my way or the highway." When it comes to flexibility they are anemic. This is not the kind of man you want making decisions for the church.

11. "... not loving money. . ." (literally, "free from the love of possessions")

Greed is a ready temptation for any leader.

The leaders in the days of Jesus loved silver and gold (Lk. 16:14). "The Pharisees, who loved money, were listening to all these things and made fun of Jesus." An interesting combination of phrases: they loved money and they mocked God.

Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters. The servant will hate one master and love the other, or will follow one master and refuse to follow the other. You cannot serve both God and worldly riches" (Lk. 16:13).

It's not uncommon for good leaders to make money. If one is prudent and temperate, he is likely prosperous, so this is a very real temptation for elders. It is not unspiritual to be blessed financially; it is unspiritual to be bound to financial success.

The church needs elders who depend on God, not their money for their self-esteem. The church needs men who walk by faith and not by stock quotes. The church needs men who know God owns all and will provide what the church needs.

12. "He must be a good family leader, having children who cooperate with full respect." (If someone does not know how to lead the family, how can that person take care of God's church?)

Curious that in a collection of bullet phrases, Paul dedicates two verses to the family.

Leading the church is more like leading a family than leading a business. A man can be an incredible manager, CEO, or military official and be a horrible father. Also a man can be a mediocre businessman, but an outstanding dad.

A good father has learned the skills of listening, give-and-take, forgiving, and teaching. That's why good fathers make good elders. Does an elder have to be a father? It is better if he is, he is better prepared if he is, but is it mandatory? Again, remember these are *traits* of an elder, not qualifications. One might have managed well a childless household and still be a good candidate for elder.

And then there's the question of "believing" children. "An elder must not be guilty of doing wrong, must have only one wife, and must have believing children" (Titus 1:6). The word for believing is the Greek word *pistos* which means faithful, loyal, trustworthy, trusted, or dutiful. "I love Timothy, and he is faithful" (1 Cor. 4:17).

Does this mean that the children must be Christians? Many would say so. Without a doubt, it would be preferred. But Alexander Strauch makes a good point when he says, "To say this passage means believing children places an impossible standard upon a father. Salvation is a supernatural act of God. God, not good parents (although they are used of God), ultimately brings salvation.

"While the characterization of a prospective elder's children as faithful does not mean they must be believers, it does mean they must be responsible and faithful family members. . . the elder must have children who are loyal

and dutiful, good citizens, or—as we might say— responsible children.”

13. “. . . not a new believer, or he might be too proud of himself and be judged guilty as the devil was.”
(Literally, “one who is spiritually mature.”)

Certain truths are learned only through time. The position of elder carries honor and recognition. Should a mantle of leadership be placed too soon on the shoulders of a new Christian, he could likely fall into the trap of the devil.

The sin of Satan was pride (Ezek. 28:1 1— 19). Haughtiness and arrogance tempt the most mature believer. A recent convert would likely stumble under the weight of the position.

14. An elder must also have the respect of people who are not in the church so he will not be criticized by others and caught in the devil’s trap.

Paul’s final concern reiterates one of our first points. Protection reveals the price. The type of man called to lead the church makes a statement about its value. If we call sloppy men, then the world perceives a sloppy church. If we call holy men, then the world perceives a holy church.

The church is quick to give the benefit of the doubt. The world is not. The church is likely to understand when a leader slips. The world will not. The unsaved watch the man from Monday to Saturday, not just on Sundays. His character during the week reflects the character of the church. For that reason, he must be respected in the community.

In conclusion, let’s remember that God seeks a special man to lead his churches. This penetrating phrase is found in 1 Samuel 13:14:

“. . .the Lord had sought out a man after his own heart.”

When God was seeking a leader for his people in Israel, he sought not a man of stature or power, but a man with a Godlike heart. “The Lord searches all the earth for people who have given themselves completely to him. He wants to make them strong” (2 Chron. 16:9).

God seeks blameless men because he seeks a blameless church. He calls his elders to set an example, not be an exception. May God grant a plurality of men in every congregation who will lead each church as shepherds lead their flocks.

Notes

Chapter 1—Who Will Lead Us?

- I. Answering Key Questions about Elders, John MacArthur, Jr., p. 21

Chapter 2—The Blameless Heart

1. Strauch, Alexander, *Biblical Eldership*, Lewis and Roth Publishers p. 192.

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